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SUBJECT: SPECIAL ENVOY FOR MONITORING AND COMBATING
ANTI-SEMITISM GREGG RICKMAN'S VISIT TO AUSTRALIA

SUMMARY

¶11. (SBU) Special Envoy for Monitoring and Combating Anti-Semitism Gregg Rickman and Foreign Affairs Officer Karen Paikin visited Australia January 21-28 to learn about the incidence of anti-Semitism in Australia. Interlocutors from government, law enforcement and the Jewish community acknowledged that an increased number of recorded acts of aggression perpetrated by louts or members of extremist groups against Jews merited action. Nevertheless, some Jewish community members assured Rickman that they enjoyed excellent relations with government and the law enforcement community, participated enthusiastically in both private and state-sponsored interfaith dialogue initiatives, and saw no evidence of pervasive anti-Semitic sentiment in mainstream Australian society. Jewish groups told the Special Envoy that while they chronicle every incident against Jews, they report to the authorities only those crimes that can reasonably be prosecuted. Rickman strongly advocated reporting all incidents to the authorities. End Summary.

MORE RECORDED INCIDENTS

¶12. (SBU) In some of his meetings, based on questions from the interlocutors as to what he would do with the information gleaned in Australia, Rickman informed interlocutors that he will testify before Congress on February 7 to render account of his activities, in connection with the publication of several reports, including the International Religious Freedom and Country Human Rights Reports. He met with a broad cross-section of Jewish leaders in Melbourne and Sydney, who gave various opinions on where they believe anti-Semitism is coming from in Australia. Many in Sydney attributed the incidents to small, disorganized extremist groups broadly identified as right-wing neo-Nazi extremists, Muslim radicals, or left-wing anti-Israel intellectuals. Some also described many of the attacks as isolated incidents of anti-social behavior. In Melbourne, the Victorian Police, state government officials and many of the Jewish community leaders attributed the majority of anti-Semitic incidents to a "growing yobbo (hooligan) culture." One thing was clear; there was no definitive answer as to who was primarily responsible. Executive Council of Australian Jewry President Robert Goot insisted, however, that mainstream Australians reject anti-Semitism as "rat-bag" behavior, and that it is not part of Australian culture.

STATE GOVERNMENTS ARE RESPONSIVE

¶13. (SBU) When meeting with government officials Rickman prefaced his remarks by saying he came in friendship, but was

disturbed to learn from the Executive Council of Australian Jewry's 2007 report of the growing number of recorded incidents of violence against Jews. In general, government officials and law enforcement representatives acknowledged that the aggregate total of isolated incidents of anti-Semitism had increased, and merited continued action by the authorities on several fronts to curb them. Rickman asked for an account of what the authorities were doing to curb such incidents. The Victorian Minister assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs, for example, gave Rickman a page-long list of actions that the Victorian government had taken not only to prevent violence against but also uphold the civil rights of all minority communities, not just Jews. The Victorian Police followed a similar line, noting that their efforts were to protect all citizens, and professed to have good communication and ties with the Jewish community. Victoria's Deputy Police Commissioner reported that the force had no record of hate crimes perpetrated against Jews, and characterized the 2007 alleged assault of Victorian Jewish community member Menachem Vorchheimer as the work of drunken louts. Rickman pressed the Deputy Police Commissioner about what actions were being taken against the off-duty policeman who drove the bus whose passengers had allegedly beat Vorchheimer. The Deputy Commissioner responded that, although he was not privy to details of the investigation, he could report that the Victorian police equivalent of internal affairs was following up on the case. Following the meeting with the Victoria police, Rickman reported a number of complaints about their conduct and effectiveness.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN VICTORIA

¶4. (SBU) Nonetheless, Jewish leaders in Melbourne generally applauded their relationships with State government and law

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enforcement. Gavin Queit of the Jewish Community Security Group reported to Rickman that he enjoyed "excellent relations" with the Victorian Police. Anton Block, head of the Victorian Jewish Community Council, noted the Victorian government's recognition of the growing number of anti-Semitic incidents and praised them for several initiatives to promote "racial and religious tolerance," including the Multi-Faith Leaders Forum and the Multicultural Youth Forum. Colin Rubenstein, Executive Director of the Australia Israel Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC), and Manny Waks, Executive Officer of the Anti-Defamation Commission (ADC), also cited the multifaith forums as positive examples of state government's action, and noted in their meetings with Rickman that there were effective communications channels existing with the Victorian police.

¶5. (SBU) In the ADC meeting Manny Waks explained that his organization did not report all incidents to the Victorian police, for example, name calling. The Special Envoy strongly advocated reporting all anti-Semitic incidents to the authorities. On Rickman's advice the ADC subsequently reported an incident of verbal abuse to a pregnant Jewish woman and her two children aboard a bus. The Victorian police logged the case as an incident of anti-Semitism. The case is now working its way through Melbourne's judicial system.

AND IN NEW SOUTH WALES

¶6. (SBU) The New South Wales (NSW) Police Force established a community contact group in 2007 responsible for liaising with communities that both emanate and are victims of attacks. In the same year, the police force established its first-ever Hate Crime Coordinator as a one year experimental position, focused exclusively on improving police action against hate crimes. The Hate Crimes coordinator, Sergeant Geoff Steer, explained to Rickman that he has focused on developing a program that will train police to recognize and document hate

crimes. Although state and federal anti-discrimination laws are relatively weak and rarely used to prosecute offenders, Steer said, the NSW state parliament passed new legislation in 2007 that includes provisions that allow judges to increase sentences for crimes aggravated by discrimination. In their conversations with Rickman, members of the Jewish community in NSW commended their relationship with the NSW law enforcement community. In late 2007, every police officer assigned to situations that cover Sydney's largest Jewish community attended Jewish awareness training sponsored by the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, which included a tour and seminar at the Holocaust Museum. The Victorian Police had a similar program and enthusiastically embraced Karen Paikin's suggestion that it liaise with the Victorian Jewish community to improve the sensitivity training of its recruits and officers. The NSW Jewish community also actively participates in state government-sponsored interfaith initiatives. For example, a rabbi, imam, and a Christian clergyman visited a number of schools in both Sydney and rural NSW in order to teach children the importance of interfaith harmony.

HOW AUSTRALIA STACKS UP

7 (SBU) In meetings with the Jewish community, Rickman explained the Congressional origins of his position and then cited concern about the reported rise of anti-Semitism in Australia. Colin Rubenstein of the AIJAC commented that he did not believe that "the situation in Australia was worse than in Europe." While noting a rise in the number of incidents being recorded, Mark Leibler, the National Chairman of the AIJAC, pointed out that "of the 600 plus incidents for 2007 only 12 were considered serious." Both men argued this was a dramatically different situation from that which was taking place in the UK and throughout Europe.

¶8. (U) In follow-up to Rickman's visit, OPA Melbourne is facilitating contact between the Victorian Police and U.S. organizations, among them the Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, responsible for tolerance training with the help of the Special Envoy's office.

¶9. (U) Special Envoy Rickman cleared this cable. CONGEN Sydney contributed to its drafting.

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